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## Southern Columns Special Supplement 1983

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# SOUTHERN COLUMNS

Southern College Alumni Magazine

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

One of the events of last October's Alumni Homecoming Weekend was a Sabbath afternoon religion symposium. The theology teachers of Southern College formed a panel to answer questions that had been previously submitted by alumni. At the beginning of the program, I indicated that questions and answers could be printed in the SOUTHERN COLUMNS for the information of all alumni. Unfortunately, the majority of the recorded transcription prohibits that being done. Instead, in this special supplement, we are including a brief synopsis of the entire program and then focusing on Elder Edwin Zackrisson's very positive and succinct response to one of the questions.

Wayne Thurber  
Editor of Southern College Alumni

## Symposium Synopsis

The one-hour Sabbath afternoon Alumni Weekend Religion Symposium was introduced by Elder Douglas Bennett, professor of religion, who presented an historical overview of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its philosophical issues. He also reiterated the position of the religion faculty take on particular issues by quoting portions of a statement published in the August 1, 1980, Southern Tidings which emphasize: "The teachers of religion wish to encourage students in the word of God and to equip them with the ability to proclaim the truth faithfully and responsibly. We also gratefully appreciate the guiding hand of the Spirit of Prophecy in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and in the continuing and reliable guidance of the writings of Ellen White in our thought-life and work of the church today. We are in harmony with the consensus statement made at Glacier House regarding 1844, the sanctuary, and pre-Advent judgment (for the investigative judgment). We further affirm that salvation is a gift of God mediated through faith alone which leads the recipient to eternal life."

Elder Bennett then presented the panel with the question: "What is the Dallas Statement and how does your denomination relate to that Dallas Statement Fundamental Beliefs?" Each member of the Southern College's Division of Religion responded to this question and then affirmed his belief in these fundamental beliefs as approved at the 1980 General Conference session in 1980 and published in the May 1, 1980, Adventist Review.

The panel's next question was "What about a literal translation or interpretation of Hebrew references to 'heavenly sanctuary'?" The panel was not clear as to whether the question referred to Old Testament Hebrew references or New Testament references in the book of Hebrews. Therefore, Elder Jerry Gladson commented on Old Testament references and Elder Ron Springett addressed the New Testament references in the book of Hebrews, referring listeners to the Additional Note on Hebrews, Chapter 10 in Volume 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, pages 467-68, as a most definitive study. Elder Bennett also



Dr. Lorenzo Grant

referred the audience to page 7 of the October 7, 1982, Adventist Review, which presented a word study on translating Hebrews 8 through 13 centering on the word for sanctuary in that passage.

The panel then addressed the question included below. Responses and explanations were presented by Elder Edwin Zackrisson, much of whose answer



The Religion faculty at Southern College are, from left to right: Elder Edwin Zackrisson, Dr. Douglas Bennett, Dr. Jerry Gladson, Dr. Lorenzo Grant, Dr. Gordon Hyde, Dr. Norman Gulley and Elder Ronald Springett.





**Elder Ron Springett addresses a question.**



**Dr. Jerry Gladson**

is detailed in this column, Elder Loren Grant, who explained some of the possible sources of such charges and facts surrounding some illustrative incidents, and Elder Jerry Gladson, who comments on how classroom teaching and pulpit preaching differ and can lead to misunderstandings if all of the facts and circumstances are not known well, especially appreciated by a number of listeners in the audience.

According to Elder Wayne Thurber, Director of Southern College Alumni, the alumni response to this religion symposium was very positive. He encourages alumni and constituents to visit with members of the religion faculty as they welcome opportunities to discuss all facets of Christianity and the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with interested alumni and constituents.

## Ask the Staff

Question: There is talk of heresy being taught here at Southern College. Even though I don't believe this to be true, what is given as the reason for the heresy charge?

By Elder Edwin Zackrisson

In the history of the Christian church, the word "heresy" is most often used in relation to a creed. Since Adventists have always maintained that they have no creed but the Bible, it is difficult to relate to the term as credal Christians do. Probably there are at least four things I think could be meant by the charge of heresy.

The first is that since we believe and state that the Bible is our creed, a heretic would be one out of harmony with the Bible. That is very hard to determine, of course, since there are different interpretations of the Bible. Number one then is a bit difficult for Adventists.

The second is that a heretic is one who is at variance with my understanding of the Bible. With this we might be getting closer to what could be meant by this heresy talk.

Number three is that a heretic can be one who is at variance with the church's understanding of the Bible. That, of course, would be our statement of fundamental beliefs. So a person who is not upholding the fundamental beliefs could be classed as a heretic. That, of course, would be an opinion until confirmed by a qualified or authorized body of examiners.

The fourth is that a heretic is one who is at variance with my understanding of the fundamental beliefs.

Let me make a statement about the fundamental beliefs. Our fundamental beliefs were formulated with some room to encourage study and some degree of freedom of expression. If there is only certain terminology allowed in the interpretation of our fundamental beliefs, it is very easy to call anybody a heretic who doesn't agree with a certain interpretation. But the charge of heresy is a very general charge that must be determined by a qualified group set up by the church.

Our theology staff as a group and as individuals have already affirmed our adherence to and agreement with the fundamental beliefs. We each tell our classes the same thing, that in our classes we will be teaching in harmony with Seventh-day Adventist accepted official teachings.

How can alumni help to answer claims of heresy? To dispel the impact of such unfair charges, they can first determine to what extent the charges are really true. That can be done partially by talking personally with the accused. Our Lord set up that policy (Matthew 18:15) and it has never been improved upon.

One of my colleagues was recently told— "But I have it from good credible sources that you are teaching heresy," replied, "I am your best source since I know what goes on in my mind and what my intentions are in a classroom."

We invite you and urge you to call and check out rumors. The college will even pay the phone bill if you call to collect.

Second, do not allow yourself to become embroiled in negativism toward



**Elder Edwin Zackrisson**

our institutions. Stop the rumor in its tracks and remember that Christian teachers have spent the better part of their lives in committed training to qualify for the positions they hold in ministry to your youth. To a large degree, our effectiveness is due to your trust. When your children hear you criticize the school, they are affected.



Finally, you can support your college. Give to this school, talk it up, send your children and grandchildren here. Communicate with us, visit us, call us, write us. Invite us to speak in your churches. Pray for us and let us know you are doing it.



We are pastors who have devoted our lives to youth evangelism. We believe that this work is in God's hands and our faith is strengthened as we see His providence worked out even in hard times. "The government is on his shoulders" (Isaiah 9:6).

In this day when so many of our youth are leaving the church, we cannot afford to allow what may be our last great bastion of youth evangelism—our schools—to be destroyed.

Elder Edwin Zackrisson is Associate Professor of Religion at Southern College.

# Heresy or Heresay

Do you remember as a child hurling nasty names back and forth with a playmate you were mad at? And do you remember after being called a particularly biting name, how you shouted back, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never harm me"? And then do you remember how you turned haughtily on your heels and strode away, head held high, only to collapse in tears as soon as the name-caller was out of sight? And why the crying? Because you knew what the name-caller knew and counted on—NAMES DO HARM.

Nor do adults forget their childhood learnings. Well aware of the effects, they indulge in a sophisticated version of the old sticks-and-stones rhyme by labeling those with different national, political, or religious beliefs as "Dago," "Commie" or "heretic."

American author Ambrose Bierce capitalized on mankind's habit of describing words in terms of personal connotations when he wrote his famous *The Devil's Dictionary*, a compilation of subjective definitions of certain loaded

"Today in the S.D.A. church too many are labeling too quickly, too invalidly, too unlovingly anyone holding divergent views as heretic, . . ."

words. For example, he defined a bigot as "One who is obstinately and zealously attached to an opinion that you do not entertain." And although Bierce did not describe the word heretic specifically, he would probably have penned a similar humorous definition. But at the dictionary the laugh stops. Today in the SDA church too many are labeling too quickly, too invalidly, too unlovingly anyone holding divergent views as heretic, a term most in the church had formerly connected with faithful martyrs for truth during the Middle Ages and Inquisition times.

Those who choose to brand fellow Adventists as heretics need to be aware of some possible dangers such as name-calling confronts. Admittedly, any

denomination must have its doctrinal boundaries, but what are some of the dangers of setting up religious Check-Point-Charlies, of sleuthing out "dangerous" dissidents and persecuting them, if not physically, then verbally?

First, a major danger is that the so-called heretic is simply not one. The very act of name-calling harms the communication process between the labeler and the one labeled, obscuring any attempts at really understanding the issue. In addition, name-labeling often sets up the framework for a self-fulfilling

"... a major danger is that the so-called heretic is simply not one."

prophecy: a person falsely accused may eventually turn bitter, having decided that a church whose members propagate any rumor they hear is not a church worth supporting. Agriculturally, some weed killers do kill weeds as advertised—but they also kill other vegetation as well. Medically, chemotherapy is effective if it destroys only the malignant cells and not the healthy ones too. Spiritually, Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares illustrates that in a church the good and bad may—for a time—have to be permitted to grow simultaneously, lest the pulling up of the tares also pull up some wheat.

A second major danger to the name-caller is that he become obsessed with that which should only be a concern—even if there exists a problem in the first place. If enough name-callers group together, their collective mania can turn the emphasis of the church from "Let's grow" to "Let's weed out", from "Let's live our faith" to "Let's be doctrinally pure"; from "Let's get involved in 1,000 Days of Reaping" to "Let's reduce to 144,000." Philosophically, heretic-hunting and 1,000-days-of-reaping seem to be dramatically opposed.

Another danger arises from a distorted view of the role of truth defenders, a warped sort of religious Machiavellism allowing any method to be justified in the name of truth. Paul must have been aware of zealous extremists when he wrote in Romans 10:2 (Phillips) "I know from experience what a passion for God they have, but alas, it is not a passion based on knowledge." Admittedly, an act done in the name of God does not make it godly.

A fourth danger awaits the accuser who labels heretical a viewpoint which



the SDA Church has left intentionally ambiguous or has not taken a definite stand on. For example, those defending a certain specific of the sanctuary issue as being "traditional" should check the church's official statements to make sure that it has declared itself one way or another on the specific being attacked as "new theology." For years, the SDA church has seemed able to cope with a varied membership, some of whom were "perfectionists" and some of whom were not. But today there are those who brand as false teachers any who promote a view different from theirs.

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"... a person falsely accused may eventually turn bitter, having decided that a church whose members propagate any rumor they hear is not a church worth supporting."

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If a name-caller does manage to avoid the dangers of his practice, he still has some penetrating questions to ask.

How many of the twenty-seven beliefs voted at Dallas does one have to believe before he is an SDA? A fourth? A half? All? And what if only twenty-six? Then would that person be called an SDA-Minus-One? What church would he join, if not an SDA one?

If indeed heretical people or activities are established as existing, how should the situation be dealt with? It tempts anyone with truth on his side to make that very virtue a vice, an opportunity for applying corrupt ecclesiastical power in the name of Jesus. But does the church ever have any place for the "tyranny of truth"? From an article documented simply, Manuscript 24, 1892, Ellen White offered these penetrating commentaries:

We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can

perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance."

Other questions need to be asked. Is the interrogator closer to Jesus by his investigations into heresy charges? Are his motives to defend truth or to defend himself? Are the methods chosen to handle rumored or established heresy governed by love? William Miller once said, "I would rather live with Christian savages rather than with savage Christians." Significantly, an analysis of Jesus' commandments will reveal that about one-half of them admonish us "to love."

Is there a possibility that the anger an accuser feels against a "heretical" brother is in reality a cover-up reaction because he has the same beliefs himself? Is he more afraid of than opposed to a new thought? Eugene McCarthy records man's tendency to defend tradition—right or wrong—in a poem entitled "Three Bad Signs":

This is a clean, safe town  
No one can just come round  
With ribbons and bright thread  
Or new books to be read

And one more question: If the new wine of truth does indeed burst old bottles, could it be that maybe someone calls another a heretic when in reality some new wine has broken a pet "old bottle" of the accuser?

Perhaps the gravest concern of all is what heretic hunting and related activities do to the church as a whole, breaking down trust, fostering suspicion, hampering growth. When so many SDA youth are

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"The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement."  
—Ellen G. White

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leaving the church, when the population of the earth is increasing faster than evangelism, when wars, famines, and disasters suggest the imminence of Jesus' return—there is little energy left to cope with such major issues when a church is obsessed with purifying the few members it does have!

The Adventist psyche has long been prepared for external persecutions, mental and/or physical, but nothing has prepared the average SDA with an emotional reserve to handle the current internal turmoil in the church. Historians are quick

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to point out that the disintegration of the Puritan Church resulted from its internal commotion, confrontation, disunity, not from its external pressures. The history of that religious group must not become the history of the SDA church.

One final observation. Some may feel that since they have not been directly involved in labeling or in being labeled one way or another in the current church controversy they can therefore "sit this dance out," carefully avoiding any action that would mark them supportive of one issue or another. A viable position? Maybe not. Again we turn to history as a commentator on the present. Martin Niemöller, a pastor in Germany during World War II, wrote in 1945:

In Germany the Nazis came for the Communists, and I did not speak up because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak up because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for ME. By that time there was no one to speak up for anyone.

Thinking of heretic-hunting, anyone? Think twice. That sport has been shown to be dangerous to spiritual health, both of the hunter and of the hunted.

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Dr. Wilma McClarty is a Professor of English at Southern College.

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